

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

## Minutes

Thursday 31 October 2024  
London Office

### Hybrid Meeting

#### Members Present

Sir Robert Chote (Chair)  
Dr Jacob Abboud  
Professor Sir John Aston  
Professor Sir Ian Diamond  
Ed Humpherson  
Professor Dame Carol Propper  
Emma Rourke  
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter  
Penny Young

#### Other Attendees

Mike Keoghan  
Alex Lambert (for item 9)  
Liz McKeown (for item 9)  
Sarah Moore  
Professor Rebecca Riley (for item 7)  
Emma Rourke (for item 8)  
Ruth Studley (for item 8)  
Tom Taylor

#### Apologies

None

#### Secretariat

Sally Jones

## **1. Apologies**

1.1 There were no apologies.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

2.1 There were no new declarations of interest.

## **3. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings.**

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 September were agreed.

## **4. Report from the Authority Chair [SA(24)53]**

4.1 Non-Executive Directors (NED) had met before the meeting and had discussed the recruitment process for NEDs.

4.2 The Chair reported on his recent activities since the Board last met:

- i. on 17 October, Sir Robert and Professor Sir Ian Diamond had met with Georgia Gould, Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office, to outline key priorities for the Authority;
- ii. Sir Robert had met with John Van Reenen and Tom Hemmingway, HM Treasury (HMT) to discuss topics including the Office for National Statistics (ONS) labour market statistics; and
- iii. Sir Robert had written to Secretaries of State regarding the ongoing consultation on the Code of Practice for Statistics highlighting the principles of intelligent transparency.

4.3 The Board heard that the recruitment process for NEDs had restarted with interviews scheduled for early December.

## **5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(24)54]**

5.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting, highlighting the following:

- i. phase one of the Spending Review 2025 (SR25) had concluded with HMT confirming the Authority's 2025/26 settlement and agreeing to a simplified funding model, including recalibrated core funding. The formal commission for SR25 phase two had not yet been received;
- ii. progress of business planning 2025/26 alongside SR25 and framing for the refresh of the Authority's strategy, Statistics for the Public Good;
- iii. Sir Ian, on behalf of the Authority, had signed an arrangement on statistical cooperation with Eurostat;
- iv. the publication of a number of economic statistics including the annual publication of Blue Book and Pink Book 2024 on 31 October;
- v. plans for communication and stakeholder engagement regarding the publication of migration statistics scheduled on 28 November;
- vi. Professor Cathie Sudlow had been commissioned by the Chief Medical Officer for England, Sir Ian and NHS England's National Director for Transformation to lead an independent review: Uniting the UK's Health Data. The report was scheduled for publication on 8 November;
- vii. the pay award process for delegated grades for 2024/25 in line with the Civil Service Pay Guidance had been agreed following consultation with the unions. Payment of the award was scheduled for November;
- viii. progress of the work by the ONS in partnership with the Royal Statistical Society on the Authority's first UK Statistics Assembly on 22 January 2025;
- ix. consideration by the Senior Leadership Team on the ONS estate. The Darlington Economic Campus had been shortlisted for a Civil Service Award; and
- x. the programme of work on FPMS. Timing for publication of the draft recommendation had been delayed due to the general election and the need for pre-ministerial engagement.

5.2 Sir Ian noted thanks to Tom Taylor and Rhys Thomas for their work on SR25.

- 5.3 The Board heard that ONS had set out options to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Department for Health and Social Care for addressing delays to data on deaths caused by long registration delays for cases referred to the coroner, which MoJ had responded to. It was acknowledged that further consideration was needed on next steps to address this issue.
- 5.4 Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter provided an update on his attendance at a recent event by Better Statistics in relation to the Assembly.
- 5.5 The Board noted the report and agreed an approach in relation to the long-standing issue of delays to coronial data. With regard to SR25 phase one it was agreed that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) aligned to the conditions set out by HMT in the settlement letter would be developed as part of the business planning process and reported at every Board meeting, with effect from April 2025. The KPIs would be agreed with key stakeholders in advance.

## **6. Report from the Director General of Regulation [SA(24)55]**

- 6.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulatory activity. The consultation for the Code of Practice for Statistics had been published on 23 October. The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) would engage with producers and stakeholder throughout the consultation period.
- 6.2 The Board heard that in response to a recommendation from the Lievesley Review OSR had published a statement on its separation from ONS. The volume of casework had increased and a blog published following concerns that the Prime Minister had used unpublished data regarding immigration. Following discussion at the last Board meeting Ed Humpherson had met with Special Advisers at the Department of Business and Trade.

## **7. Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence [SA(24)56]**

- 7.1 Sir Robert welcomed Professor Rebecca Riley, Director of the Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence (ESCoE), to the meeting. ESCoE had been established as part of the Bean Review.
- 7.2 The Board heard about the opportunities, challenges and impact of ESCoE which facilitates research led development of economic statistics delivered through an international research network working in partnership with ONS.
- 7.3 Areas of innovation in economic statistics included: novel surveys, new uses of existing surveys, new methods to harness new data sources, historical data, hard to measure concepts and measuring new concepts. ESCoE had worked in partnership with ONS in a range of areas including Gross Domestic Product, Consumer Price Index methodology to incorporate scanner data, measuring public sector productivity, communicating uncertainty in economic statistics and preparation for the System of National Accounts 2025.
- 7.4 The following points were made in discussion:
- i. the most appropriate funding mechanism for ESCoE and the value it provided for ONS;
  - ii. the model of good engagement with ONS was based on joint working underpinned by a clear understanding of the project at the outset. This was facilitated by a readiness to engage by teams at both ESCoE and ONS, ongoing communication, and the ability to adapt as necessary;
  - iii. ESCoE's approach to the development of its programme of research; and
  - iv. resourcing and development of PhD early career researchers with the required level of support in place.
- 7.5 The Board noted their thanks for an excellent presentation and invited Professor Riley to return for further discussions as needed. Sir Ian and Mike Keoghan noted ESCoE's excellent work and valuable contributions to the ONS.

## **8. The Future of Population and Migration Statistics Recommendation [SA(24)57]**

8.1 As this area of work is in development, this paper will be published upon completion.

## **9. Transformed Labour Force Survey/Labour Force Survey [SA(24)58]**

9.1 Alex Lambert and Liz McKeown introduced a paper which provided an update on the Labour Force Survey and the Transformed Labour Force Survey.

9.2 The Board heard that the project was amber red, which reflected the risks associated meeting labour market quality criteria. The plan of work to February and the focus of the February design review had been agreed. As part of the development of the TLFS three shorter versions of the survey, referred to collectively as the LMX, had gone live on 28 October with analysis of the impact of the shorter survey taking place during November and December. In September, an update on TLFS data had been provided to users. The three key risks remained, the collection of Complex Data Variable, UK Data Coherence and conflicting resource pressures.

9.3 Board members discussed the update of the LFS/TLFS. The following points were considered in discussion:

- i. the Stakeholder Advisory Panel chaired by Jonathan Portes would consider LFS and TLFS quality issues at its October meeting;
- ii. the impact of LFS recovery actions implemented at the end of 2023/24 would not be fully seen in labour market estimates until quarter two of 2025. Until this point labour market estimates would be subject to more volatility. Clear communication and increased transparency would be needed to provide clarity for users on the volatility of the data;
- iii. the request by ONS to suspend the accreditation of ONS outputs based on the Annual Population Survey given the need to address quality issues; and
- iv. progress of work to improve Standard Industrial Classification and Standard Occupational data for the TLFS including the use of Artificial Intelligence.

9.4 The Board noted the report and would continue to remain engaged as the work progressed.

## **10. Any Other Business**

10.1 The Board would next meet on Thursday 28 November.

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

## Agenda

**Thursday 31 October, 11.15-14.00**  
**London Boardroom, Hybrid Meeting**

**Chair:** Sir Robert Chote

**Apologies:** None

**Attendees:** Alex Lambert (for item 7), Liz McKeown (for item 7), Professor Rebecca Riley (for item 5), Emma Rourke (for item 6), Ruth Studley (for item 6)

**NED Session: 10.30-11.15**

1 11.15-11.20 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting Declarations of interest	Meeting of 26 September 2024
2 11.20-11.30 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	SA(24)53 Sir Robert Chote
3 11.30-12.00 30 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(24)54 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
4 12.00-12.10 10 mins	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(24)55 Ed Humpherson
12.10-12.20 10 mins	Break	
5 12.20-13.00 40 mins	Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence	Prof. Rebecca Riley
6 13.00-13.25 25 mins	Future of Population and Migration Statistics Recommendation	SA(24)57 Emma Rourke Ruth Studley
7 13.25-13.45 20 mins	Transformed Labour Force Survey/Labour Force Survey	SA(24)58 Alex Lambert Liz McKeown
8 13.45-14.00 15 mins	Any Other Business	

**Next meeting: 28 November 2024, London Boardroom**

*Chair's Report, October 2024*

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with an overview of the Chair's activity in October 2024.

**Review of recent activities**

2. On 3 October, I was the guest speaker at the Statistical Dinner Club. The Club, co-chaired by Professor Guy Nason and Sir Bernard Silverman, is predominantly composed of academics and statisticians including former members of the Royal Statistical Society, plus invited guests. It meets to discuss and debate issues relating to data and statistics. I was invited to speak about the future of the statistical system with particular reference to the Authority's implementation of the Lievesley Review, followed by discussion.
3. On 8 October, I delivered the closing remarks at the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Conference. As last year, the conference was conducted hybridly with participants joining in-person this year from Newport, Belfast, York, London, Manchester and Edinburgh plus a large presence online. The day included guest speakers from Full Fact, Simon Baugh (Head of Government Communications), Ed Humpherson and Mona Kanaan (University of York), with sessions throughout the day run by departmental heads of profession and leaders from across the GSS. In my remarks, I commended the launch of the GSS Vision and encouraged engagement with the statistical assembly.
4. On 9 October, I met with John Van Reenen and Tom Hemingway, HM Treasury, to discuss the Office for National Statistics (ONS) labour market statistics.
5. On 11 October, I conducted stakeholder conversations with the shortlisted candidates for the Deputy Director of Strategy and Policy post to answer their questions about the organisation. Interviews will take place on 28 October.
6. On 17 October, Sir Ian and I visited statisticians at the Department for Transport as part of an ongoing series of visits with GSS departments. We each gave brief introductory remarks about the statistical system and then took questions from the floor. We have previously met with statisticians from the Home Office and the central health bodies for similar visits.
7. Also on the 17 October, Sir Ian and I met with Georgia Gould, Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office and new Minister responsible for sponsorship of the Authority. We spoke through our structure and current priorities, with Sir Ian explaining the ONS's main statistical outputs and programmes. We invited her to visit the Newport office for more in-depth presentations on current workstreams. I predominantly spoke to the Office for Statistics Regulation's (OSR) priorities, including intelligent transparency, and highlighted the necessity to restart our non-executive director recruitment process, which has now progressed.
8. This month, I also held my regular catchups with the National Statistician, Director General for Regulation, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance and Committee chairs.

**Correspondence**

9. On 23 October, I wrote privately to Secretaries of State drawing their attention to the recently launched consultation on the refresh of the Code of Practice. The letter outlined the principles of intelligent transparency, which we expect Ministers to abide by when using their department's statistics in public debate. We also offered further guidance and support from the Authority and the OSR for ministers and their staff on statistical matters.

**Sir Robert Chote, Chair, 23 October 2024**

***Chief Executive's Report, October 2024***

**Purpose**

1. This provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of activity for October 2024.

**Summary**

2. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) continues to ensure that decision-makers have access to reliable, timely data to shape immediate policy responses. As a member of the Civil Service's Senior Analytical Leadership Team, it has been a pleasure to represent the ONS and wider statistical and analytical community in numerous ministerial and official engagements including ones on child poverty and data sharing. Colleagues from across the office have been working closely and collaboratively with other government departments to help guide many new users of our statistics.
3. Internationally, it has also been an important month for the office. On behalf of the UKSA and ONS, I signed an arrangement on statistical cooperation with Eurostat which will enhance collaboration between our offices and has been received positively by our stakeholders. Also this month, I had the privilege of meeting Minister Leigh from Australia for a wide-ranging discussion around census, evaluation and data collection.

**Summary of activities**

4. In Parliament, Mike Keoghan and Liz McKeown met Torsten Bell MP regarding labour market statistics and Mary Gregory presented to the All Party Parliamentary Groups on International Students regarding international migration statistics. We are also preparing to brief Baroness Twycross, our Cabinet Office Minister, to answer a Lords Oral Question from Baroness Fox regarding the 2021 Census question on gender identity, what steps they are taking to ensure accurate and consistent data on sex and gender are collected to ensure robust official data. This will be debated on 5 November.
5. On behalf of the UK Statistics Authority and ONS, I signed an arrangement on statistical cooperation with Eurostat. This agreement will enhance collaboration between our offices, with an initial focus on the transfer of Gross Domestic Product data for the purposes of article 714(6) of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, as well as other areas of economic statistics. The arrangement is a living document and there is a possibility of adding additional areas in future if agreed with Eurostat.
6. The results from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings for 2024 will be released on 29 October. They will include the latest estimate of the gender pay gap as well as a range of earnings estimates for occupations across the UK.
7. The annual publication of Blue Book and Pink Book is on the 31 October. This is one of our major milestones for the year and tells a comprehensive picture of the UK economy covering national and sector accounts, industrial analyses, environmental accounts, and flow of transactions between UK residents and the rest of the world. This year the major changes were improvements to health care volumes, improvements to the UK trade gas exports deflator and moving the base year from 2019 to 2022 to fully reflect the changes in the composition of the economy for the first time following the COVID-19 pandemic.
8. The latest ONS greenhouse gas emissions (residence basis) provisional 2023 figures were published, alongside an update to our useful guide to three UK emissions measures.
9. We held our quarterly Senior Sponsorship Committee on 2 October, presenting on the progress to date on the Public Services Productivity Review. The Review is reporting green and on track to deliver all outputs this year. On 21 October we published a collective package of data

providing insight into where productivity could potentially be improved by investing in better practices, skills, structures, and innovation.

10. In September, the public sector finances team concluded their project to improve the accuracy of central government debt interest data and implemented the improvements in our published statistics. This provides better information to inform decisions made about public finances and addresses a long-standing request from users including the Office for Budget Responsibility and HM Treasury.
11. We are about to begin the process for hiring a new Chair for our Advisory Panel on Consumer Prices (Stakeholder), following Dame Kate Barker's decision to step down in April 2025. The Lievesley Review highlighted the importance of open and transparent processes to fill high-profile public appointments, and this campaign will be a forerunner in demonstrating our new approach to these appointments.
12. For the first time this month, the Analytical Hub have gathered and published opinions and lifestyle data related to missions and have shared with the centre of Government. These are now available on the No10 Data Science dashboard.
13. The ONS Centre for Crime and Justice are working closely with Home Office and the Ministry of Justice to understand how data from the crime survey can best be used to inform metrics for the safer streets mission.
14. Our ONS Local Datathon event was a great success, with entries from regional teams across the UK collaborating to solve problems relevant to their local areas. We will be releasing a blog with more detail shortly. Winners have been invited to present at our Local Data conference in Leeds on the 14 November.
15. Data Science Campus have three new financial transactions data publications using Visa Big Data, demonstrating its use for cross-government impact and collaboration. The latest ONS piece is on the UK tourism industry, supporting the ONS Subnational team to meet user demand for more timely estimates. The campus also published the outputs of the BBC microbit playground survey which sought to engage primary school children aged 7 to 11 in data and statistics and have started a project working alongside Faculty AI to identify how alternative data sources may support admin-based population estimates of characteristics.
16. Earlier this year, ONS set out options to Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) for addressing delays to data on deaths referred to the coroner, especially those going to inquest; their response was delayed by the election and the focus being on death certification reform roll out.
17. We have been carrying out further engagement activities with key users of our population and migration statistics in anticipation of the recommendation being published in the coming months. This has included internal webinars to provide a summary to all colleagues as well as external engagement with the Devolved Administrations, National Health Service England, Department for Work and Pensions and National Records Scotland. We have also presented at the International Census Forum and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
18. On 8 October we published UK population estimates, with much media coverage. We continue working towards publishing admin-based population estimates (ABPEs) as the official population estimate for the first time in summer 2025.
19. This month saw the launch of 'Strength in Numbers' the new strategic vision for the Government Statistical Service (GSS). This vision celebrates how the GSS achieves collaboration across each of the key areas of Coordination, cooperation and leadership; Capability and community; Setting Standards; and Transformation and Innovation; and sets out a vision for furthering cooperation and impact, alongside strengthening the identity of the GSS. It is underpinned by an action plan and Management Information that will be monitored by National Statistics Executive Group biannually.



20. The GSS Vision was launched at the 2024 GSS Conference, held this month. The theme of this year's conference was Beyond numbers: Championing Interdisciplinary Collaboration with Statistics. Keynote speakers included Sir Robert Chote, Ed Humpherson, Full Fact, and the head of the Government Communications Service. These were accompanied by parallel sessions, celebrating and sharing statistical best practice across the GSS. The conference was held hybrid, with official venues in Newport, Edinburgh, York, as well as Heads of Profession hosted sessions in London, Manchester, and Belfast. The conference was a great success, with approximately 1000 attendees in total (up 50 per cent from last year), which is over ten per cent of the whole GSS.
21. October has also seen a busy schedule of high-level meetings, including the quarterly GSS Heads of Profession meeting, bimonthly Departmental Directors of Analysis meeting, and quarterly Inter Administration Committee being held in Edinburgh. Sir Robert and I also visited the Department for Transport for their pan-department meeting of statisticians to consider current events in government and topics relevant to the GSS.
22. October marks the launch of 'One Big Thing 2024' across the Civil Service. This year's theme is innovation with a particular focus on making big change starting with 'one small thing'. This year's focus will have significantly less emphasis on formal learning, instead promoting high quality conversations at a local level and experimenting in a safe space with new ideas.
23. We launched a programme of communications activity to increase public understanding on ONS' use of data. Our 'Bringing data to life Webinar Series' has received very positive feedback, with over 800 attendees at our first session and 77 per cent of participants who responded saying they feel more comfortable now about their data being used to produce statistics. We shared new education resources with over 16,000 teachers and educational organisations to engage young people on data, which we promoted through an article in FE news, as well as receiving endorsement from stakeholders including the Royal Statistical Society and the Geographic Association. We have developed our website content and received 450,000 social media impressions, alongside working with two social media influencers to produce six innovative videos which have had 44,000 plays so far.
24. The Director for Operations and colleagues from People and Business Services attended a United Nations conference for Human Resources professionals in National Statistics Institutes (NSI) from 14 to 16 October. The event was attended by delegates from a wide range of international NSIs. Our team's key reflections noted that most of our NSI comparators are experiencing similar challenges in the people space to those of ONS, and there were no clear solutions shared which we are not already pursuing.
25. Our move to a new Google workbench has been set up and tested as a collaborative effort in a short timescale by the Cloud Support Services and Processing Applications teams liaising with the Prices team in the business. This is a good example of focus and One ONS.

**Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, 24 October 2024**

***Update from the Director General for Regulation***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board with an overview of Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) activities.

**Discussion**

2. Our main areas of focus since the last Board meeting have been:
  - i. **Code refresh and Consultation:** Our Code consultation was published on 23 October following approval from the Regulation Committee. We will engage with producers and stakeholders throughout the consultation period, highlighting our proposals for Code 3.0;
  - ii. **OSR 2.0:** At the end of September, we held a series of internal workshops to progress our OSR 2.0 programme. This included an outline from the Chair of his priorities for OSR; defining our engagement approach for the next iteration of our five-year plan; and sessions on our organisational structure, the role of automation in regulation, how we enhance our partnerships and the evolution of our regulatory model. We will now work to develop our early proposals as part of our contribution to the new Authority Strategy and the second phase of our spending review bid;
  - iii. **Economic statistics review:** As noted at the last meeting, the review is focusing initially on data sources before moving on to the effectiveness of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in meeting user needs and ONS organisational context. We have now held around 25 discussions with external stakeholders, including HM Treasury and the Office for Budget Responsibility, devolved administrations, think tanks and other experts. Key themes from these discussions have included the effectiveness with which ONS identifies and prioritises its core outputs, the ONS vision and strategy for integrating surveys and other data sources, and the ONS approach to maintaining and improving the quality of its data sources. We are engaging with ONS to investigate the issues raised. To date we have held roundtable and bilateral discussions involving around 30 ONS colleagues; and
  - iv. **Crime:** We have shared our draft report for the review of fraud and computer misuse statistics with stakeholders. We confirmed the reaccreditation of the estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, subject to ONS making some continued improvements to the presentation of the statistics.
3. Since the last meeting we have published:
  - i. **Spotlight on Quality Assessment:** We published our [quality assessment of Price Index of Private Rents \(PIPR\)](#). Our report represents the first phase in our assessment process, and we have asked ONS to publish an action plan setting out how it will address the five assessment requirements highlighted in the report. Overall, the assessment found that ONS's new Price Index of Private Rents (PIPR) statistics generally appear to meet users' needs more effectively than previous private rents measures and users were generally positive about ONS's open approach to engagement during the development of PIPR.

**Casework**

4. Since the last Board meeting, we have received 21 cases on topics including Salmon, immigration statistics, inflation and UK Health Security Agency infographics. We have also received a coordinated campaign consisting of 10 cases concerned with the June quarterly release of TB in cattle in Great Britain statistics. We have closed 10 cases on topics such as the Lower Thames crossing costing, deaths and population claims.
5. I [published a blog](#) following concerns that the Prime Minister had used unpublished data to discuss immigration. I highlighted the importance of transparency in conference speeches, the

importance of using data that is publicly available, and our expectations across government. I also [wrote to the Gambling Commission](#) following their concern with how Gambling with Lives was using their statistics.

6. Our [annual review of Casework](#) was published since the last Board meeting including a section on our role and impact in promoting and safeguarding official statistics during the General Election.

#### Wider reach

7. **External events:** Since the last Board I attended the Government Statistical Service conference in Edinburgh and presented a session with Simon Baugh, head of the Government Communication Service. I also attended the Central Government Partnerships Network to talk about rebuilding trust in relation to data sharing and linkage for the public good. Earlier this month I attended the Abu Dhabi International Statistics Advisory Committee, which met in Dubai. I heard about their use of administrative data and their development of tools to make data more accessible to policymakers. We host the return visit from an Abu Dhabi delegation in November.

#### Issues on my mind

8. **Resource profile:** We continue to operate within our budget, but the tightness of the budget position means that we are having to make some uncomfortable prioritisation decisions. This includes reducing the size of our health and education domains. We consider that we can continue to deliver our core objectives, but I will keep the Regulation Committee and Board updated.

**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 23 October 2024**

***The Future of Population and Migration Statistics Recommendation***

*As this area of work is in development, this paper will be published upon completion.*

## ***Transformed Labour Force Survey – October 2024 Update***

### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides a monthly update to the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) on the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) project.

### **Recommendations**

2. Members of the Board are invited to:
  - i. note the continued progress and opportunity to complete the shortened TLFS survey;
  - ii. comment on the intended scope of the February 2025 design review;
  - iii. note ongoing work to mitigate complex data collection and UK data coherence risks; and
  - iv. note emerging requirements from users for more clarity on the timing of improved Labour Force Survey (LFS) quality and how we are responding to this.

### **Background**

3. Following July's decision to continue the parallel run of the LFS and TLFS, the project is focused on the further development of the TLFS to improve the quality of labour market data collected on the new survey. This work is testing three shorter versions of the survey (known collectively as the LMX), improving the capture of complex data variables (e.g. standard industrial/occupational classification) and developing a revised integrated design to meet both labour market and non-labour requirements. This work, together with the development of a strategic roadmap out to 2027, is feeding into an Executive Committee (ExCo) design review in February 2025.
4. As reported at the last Board meeting, there is a strong need to continue to improve the LFS quality while TLFS development progresses and significant stakeholder focus on this – as we outline below. Related quality issues also affect the Annual Population Survey (APS), a separate data set that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) produces by aggregating multiple years of LFS waves one and five, plus data from an additional annual survey known as the 'LFS boost'. This paper also provides the Board with a brief update on recent engagement with the Office for Statistical Regulation (OSR) and users on APS quality.

### **Discussion**

#### ***Progress and Plans Strategic Update***

5. The project is formally reporting as amber - red within the Ambitious, Radical, Inclusive Economic Statistics and Survey Transformation programmes. This reflects remaining material risks and uncertainties associated with meeting labour market quality criteria. Since the last Board, the project continues to make positive progress:
  - i. the prioritised plan of work to February and the focus and topics of the February design review have now been agreed;
  - ii. a recent 'Go' decision on the launch of the LMX survey for the first cohort of respondents on 21 October. A second cohort will go live on 28 October with analysis of the impact of the shorter survey taking place during November and December. The web address and unique access codes provide the opportunity for board members to complete the LMX in a test environment; and
  - iii. in September, we provided a further TLFS data update to users. As part of our data share commitment, the latest Labour Market tables were delivered to users, accompanied by a well-attended and received show and tell event.
6. As reported at the last Board meeting, the top three key risks remain, the collection of Complex Data Variables, UK Data Coherence, and conflicting resource pressures. A deep dive on the first

two risks is presented below, while for the third, the project continues to prioritise available resources across workstreams and recruit, with additional staff joining from November.

7. The project would also draw the Board's attention to a desire on behalf of stakeholders to have better visibility about when they can have improved confidence in the LFS estimates, the implications of this and how we are looking to address this. Expanding on the two related aspects of this issue:
  - i. while the LFS recovery actions were implemented at the end of 2023/start of 2024, there are practical limitations to the speed of any improvements on the LFS given the five-quarter wave structure of the survey which means impacts won't be fully seen in labour market estimates until Quarter 2 of 2025. Until this period labour market estimates will be subject to more volatility than usual making it difficult to tell the labour market story. The Stakeholder Advisory Panel on 24 October will tackle this issue, sharing the quality improvements already achieved on the LFS and the further improvements that will occur over time as the larger data set sizes flow through the later waves on the survey (see LFS/APS Quality below for further information). Following the Panel, we will review the need to update our communication of this to the wider set of LFS users; and
  - ii. we recognise that this could generate pressure from some external stakeholders to move to TLFS sooner than is sensible. This would have the effect of replacing one set of LFS quality issues with a different set of TLFS quality issues with respect to labour market estimates. To mitigate this risk, we are revisiting TLFS plans to ensure they are comprehensive and moving forward as quickly as possible, and engaging with users, including through the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on 24 October panel, to see if there is value in using early TLFS data in some way in the interim. However, such a move would need to be properly tested and trailed to avoid looking chaotic.

#### Improving the Quality of Complex Data Variable Collection

8. The root cause of the complex data variable data quality issue is that the current online questions do not adequately replicate the rich two-way conversation that a skilled interviewer uses to classify a respondent's role onto the complex standardised industrial and occupational coding frames.
9. Three workstreams are addressing this issue), with the first being to build an extensive understanding of the array of Standard Industrial Classifications/ Standard Occupational Classifications uses and quality requirements. With the need to enhance the quality of data received from respondents, the project is exploring the potential of respondent facing generative AI via the use of generative search and text, alongside the introduction of a more respondent friendly coding frame. The project is completing the technical design by the end of December 2024, with a stretch target for a technology demonstrator in the same period.
10. To improve the coding and processing of complex data, work has been proceeding to implement enhancements to the clerical matching tool, alongside questionnaire changes to introduce questions for business name and address which can be used to link to information ONS already holds on UK businesses. The results of the additional question and data linkage will be available within the LMX analysis by January 2025.
11. The use of Artificial Intelligence is an emerging capability that shows promise in resolving complex collection challenges, however, the TLFS complex data variable scenario is novel in its complexity and as such carry's uncertainty and risk at a critical time. For the February design review, the project will be in a far more informed position on the potential of this tool to address the issue and have refined the preferred fallback plan, likely involving more traditional interviewing approaches.

#### UK Data Coherence

12. In the event that The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) transition to their transformed Labour Market Survey ahead of when ONS transition to the TLFS, there is a risk to

the production of UK data outputs for that period of misalignment. NISRA attended a highly productive workshop with ONS on 16 and 17 October on some of the technical impacts and options in this scenario.

13. From this workshop it is evident that NISRA are still developing their operational processing systems and decommissioning timelines but are keen to look at decisions in March/April 2025. While the ambitious NISRA timescales may be subject to change, the project has identified it should be possible to merge the new Northern Ireland transformed Labour Market Survey data with the current GB LFS data for core labour market statistics, but this would require modifications to the LFS processing systems.
14. The project is now working through the impact and complexity of this additional work and recognises the need to further develop a wider strategy given the reduced breadth of data NISRA will be collecting once the LFS in Northern Ireland turns off.

#### LFS and APS Data Quality

15. Following the decision to continue the dual running of TLFS with LFS/APS in July, we have been implementing an LFS sustainability plan to ensure the technical systems and methodological design used to create LFS and APS outputs are stable and improved, where possible to ensure the smooth operation of the surveys through the extended dual running period.

#### **Conclusion**

16. The TLFS remains a complex and fast paced project. The launch of the LMX test is an important milestone and this paper summarises the continued work to mitigate the risks of complex data collection and UK data coherence. While efforts continue at pace to improve LFS data quality during the remaining development of the TLFS, it is important that we are able to provide more clarity to users around when they can have greater confidence in this data, recognising its critical importance.

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